Old Prussian language

Old Prussian was a Western Baltic language belonging to the Balto-Slavic branch of the Indo-European languages, once spoken by the Old Prussians, the Baltic peoples of the Prussian region. The language is called Old Prussian to avoid confusion with the German dialects of Low Prussian and High Prussian and with the adjective *Prussian* as it relates to the later German state. Old Prussian began to be written down in the Latin alphabet in about the 13th century, and a small amount of literature in the language survives.

Old Prussian	
Prūsiskai[1]	
Native to	Prussia (region)
Region	Baltic region
Ethnicity	Baltic Prussians
Extinct	Early 18th century[2]
Revival	Attempted revival, with 50 L2 speakers (no date)[3]

Language family	Indo-European
	• Balto-Slavic
	  • Baltic
	    • Western Baltic
	      • **Old Prussian**

Writing system	Latin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	`prg`
Glottolog	prus1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/prus1238)[4]

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Original territory

In addition to Prussia proper, the original territory of the Old Prussians might have included eastern parts of Pomerelia (some parts of the region east of the Vistula River). The language might have also been spoken much further east and south in what became Polesia and part of Podlasie, with the conquests by Rus and Poles starting in the 10th century and the German colonisation of the area that began in the 12th century.

Relation to other languages

Old Prussian was closely related to the other extinct Western Baltic languages, namely Curonian, Galindian[5] and Sudovian. It is related to the Eastern Baltic languages such as Lithuanian and Latvian, and more distantly related to Slavic. Compare the words for "land": Old Prussian *semmē*, Russian: земля́ (*zemljá*), Latvian: *zeme* and Lithuanian: *žemė*.

Old Prussian contained loanwords from Slavic languages (e.g., Old Prussian *curtis* "hound", like Lithuanian *kùrtas* and Latvian *kũrts*, comes from Slavic (compare Ukrainian: хорт, *khort*; Polish: *chart*; Czech: *chrt*)), as well as a few borrowings from Germanic, including from Gothic (e.g., Old Prussian *ylo* "awl" as with Lithuanian *ýla*, Latvian *īlens*) and from Scandinavian languages.[6]

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Decline

With the conquest of the Old Prussian territory by the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century, and the subsequent influx of Polish, Lithuanian and especially German speakers, Old Prussian experienced a 400 year-long decline as an "oppressed language of an oppressed population".[7] Groups of people from Germany, Poland,[8][9] Lithuania, France, Scotland,[10] England,[11] and Austria (see Salzburg Protestants) found refuge in Prussia during the Protestant Reformation and thereafter. Old Prussian ceased to be spoken probably around the beginning of the 18th century,[2] due to many of its remaining speakers dying in the famines and bubonic plague epidemics which harrowed the East Prussian countryside and towns from 1709 until 1711.[12] The Germanic regional dialect of Low German spoken in Prussia (or East Prussia), called Low

Distribution of the Baltic tribes, circa 1200 CE (boundaries are approximate).

Prussian (cf. High Prussian, also a Germanic language), preserved a number of Baltic Prussian words, such as *kurp*, from the Old Prussian *kurpi*, for *shoe* in contrast to common Low German *Schoh* (standard German *Schuh*).

Before the 1930s, when Nazi Germany began a program of Germanisation, one could find Old Prussian river- and place-names there, such as *Tawe* and *Tawellningken*.[13]

Sample texts

Versions of the Lord's Prayer

Lord's Prayer after Simon Grunau (Curonian-Latvian)

> Nossen Thewes, cur tu es Delbes,
> Schwiz gesger thowes Wardes;
> Penag mynys thowe Mystalstibe;
> Toppes Pratres giriad Delbszisne, tade tymnes sennes Worsinny;
> Dodi momines an nosse igdenas Magse;
> Unde geitkas pamas numas musse Nozegun, cademas pametam nusson Pyrtainekans;
> No wede numus panam Padomum;
> Swalbadi mumes newusse Layne. Jesus. Amen.

Lord's Prayer after <u>Prätorius</u> (Curonian-Latvian)

> Thewes nossen, cur tu es Debbes,
> Schwisch gesger thowes Wardes;
> Pena mynis thowe Wiswalstybe;
> Toppes Patres gir iat Delbeszisne, tade tymnes senjnes Worsinny;
> Annosse igdenas Mayse dodi mums szon Dien;
> Pamutale mums musu Noschegun, kademas pametan nousson Pyktainekans;
> No wede numus panam Paadomam;
> Swalbadi names ne wust Tayne.

Lord's Prayer in Old Prussian (from the so-called "1st Catechism")

> Thawe nuson kas tu asse Andangon,
> Swintits wirst twais Emmens;
> Pergeis twais Laeims;
> Twais Quaits audasseisin na Semmey, key Andangon;
> Nusan deininan Geittin deis numons schindeinan;
> Bha atwerpeis numans nuson Auschautins, kay mas atwerpimay nuson
> Auschautenikamans;
> Bha ny wedais mans Enperbandan;
> Sclait is rankeis mans assa Wargan. Amen

Lord's Prayer in Lithuanian dialect of <u>Insterburg</u> (Prediger Hennig)

> Tewe musu, kurs essi Danguje,
> Buk szwenczamas Wardas tawo,
> Ateik tawo Karalijste;
> Buk tawo Walle kaip Daguje, taip ir an Zemes;
> Duna musu dieniszka duk mums ir sze Diena;
> Atleisk mums musu Kaltes, kaip mes atoeidzjam sawo Kaltiems;
> Ne wesk mus Pagundima;
> Bet gelbek mus nu Pikto.

Lord's Prayer in Lithuanian dialect of <u>Nadruvia</u>, corrupted (Simon Prätorius)

> Tiewe musu, kursa tu essi Debsissa,
> Szwints tiest taws Wards;
> Akeik mums twa Walstybe;
> Tawas Praats buk kaip Debbesissa taibant wirszu Sjemes;
> Musu dieniszka May e duk mums ir szen Dienan;
> Atmesk mums musu Griekus, kaip mes pammetam musi Pardokonteimus;
> Ne te wedde mus Baidykle;
> Bet te passarge mus mi wissa Louna (Pikta)

A list of remains of Old Prussian

- Prussian-language geographical names within the territory of (Baltic) Prussia. Georg Gerullis undertook the first basic study of these names in *Die altpreußischen Ortsnamen* ("The Old Prussian Place-names"), written and published with the help of Walter de Gruyter, in 1922.
- Prussian personal names.[14]
- Separate words found in various historical documents.
- Vernacularisms in the German dialects of East and West Prussia, as well as words of Old Curonian origin in Latvian and West-Baltic vernacularisms in Lithuanian and <u>Belarusian</u>.

- The so-called Basel Epigram, the oldest written Prussian sentence (1369).[15][16] It reads:

Kayle rekyse	Cheers, Sir!
thoneaw labonache thewelyse	You are no longer a good little comrade
Eg koyte poyte	if you want to drink
nykoyte pênega doyte	(but) do not want to give a penny!

This jocular inscription was most probably made by a Prussian student studying in Prague (Charles University); found by Stephen McCluskey (1974) in manuscript MS F.V.2 (book of physics *Questiones super Meteororum* by Nicholas Oresme), fol. 63r, stored in the Basel University library.

The epigram of Basel - oldest known inscription in Prussian language and Baltic language in general, middle of 14th c

- Various fragmentary texts:
  Recorded in several versions by Hieronymus Maletius in Sudovian Nook in the middle of the 16th century, as noted by Vytautas Mažiulis, are:

  1. *Beigeite beygeyte peckolle* ("Run, run, devils!")
  2. *Kails naussen gnigethe* ("Hello our friend!")
  3. *Kails poskails ains par antres* – a drinking toast, reconstructed as *Kaīls pas kaīls, aīns per āntran* ("A healthy one after a healthy one, one after another!")
  4. *Kellewesze perioth, Kellewesze perioth* ("A carter drives here, a carter drives here!")
  5. *Ocho moy myle schwante panicke* – also recorded as *O hoho Moi mile swente Pannike*, *O ho hu Mey mile swenthe paniko*, *O mues miles schwante Panick* ("Oh my dear holy fire!")

- A manuscript fragment of the first words of the *Pater Noster* in Prussian, from the beginning of the 15th century: *Towe Nüsze kås esse andangonsün swyntins*.

- 100 words (in strongly varying versions) of the Vocabulary by friar Simon Grunau (Simon Grunovius), a historian of the Teutonic Knights, written c. 1517–1526 in his *Preussische Chronik*. Apart from those words Grunau also recorded an expression *sta nossen rickie, nossen rickie* ("This (is) our lord, our lord").

- The so-called Elbing Vocabulary, which consists of 802 thematically sorted words and their German equivalents. Peter Holcwesscher from Marienburg copied the manuscript around 1400; the original dates from the beginning of the 14th or the end of the 13th century. It was found in 1825 by Fr Neumann among other manuscripts acquired by him from the heritage of the Elbing merchant A. Grübnau; it was thus dubbed the *Codex Neumannianus*.

- The three Catechisms[17] printed in Königsberg in 1545, 1545, and 1561 respectively. The first two consist of only six pages of text in Old Prussian – the second one being a correction of the first into another Old Prussian dialect. The third catechism, or *Enchiridion*, consists of 132 pages of text, and is a translation of Luther's Small Catechism by a German cleric called Abel Will, with his Prussian assistant Paul Megott. Will himself knew little or no Old Prussian, and his Prussian interpreter was probably illiterate, but according to Will spoke Old Prussian quite well. The text itself is mainly a word-for-word translation, and Will phonetically recorded Megott's oral translation. Because of this, the *Enchiridion* exhibits many irregularities, such as the lack of case agreement in phrases involving an article and a noun, which followed word-for-word German originals as opposed to native Old Prussian syntax.

- Commonly thought of as Prussian, but probably actually Lithuanian (at least the adage, however, has been argued to be genuinely West Baltic, only an otherwise unattested dialect[18]):
    1. An adage of 1583, *Dewes does dantes, Dewes does geitka*: the form *does* in the second instance corresponds to Lithuanian future tense *duos* ("will give")
    2. *Trencke, trencke!* ("Strike! Strike!")

Grammar

With other remains being merely word lists, the grammar of Old Prussian is reconstructed chiefly on the basis of the three Catechisms. There is no consensus on the number of cases that Old Prussian had, and at least four can be determined with certainty: nominative, genitive, accusative and dative, with different desinences. There are traces of a vocative case, such as in the phrase *O Deiwe Rikijs* "O God the Lord", reflecting the inherited PIE vocative ending *-e*. There was a definite article (*stas* m., *sta* f.); three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter, and two numbers: singular and plural. Declensional classes were *a*-stems, *ā*-stems (feminine), *ē*-stems (feminine), *i*-stems, *u*-stems, *ī/jā*-stems, *jā/ijā*-stems and consonant-stems. Present, future and past tense are attested, as well as optative forms (imperative, permissive), infinitive, and four participles (active/passive present/past).

Phonology

The following description is based on the phonological analysis by Schmalstieg (1974):

Consonants

		Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Post- alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	voiceless	p	t		k	
	voiced	b	d		g	
Fricative	voiceless	f*	s	(ʃ)		h*
	voiced	v	z	(ʒ)		
Nasal		m	n			
Trill			r			
Approximant			l	j		

- It is said that palato-alveolar fricatives /ʃ, ʒ/ could have been recorded as well.
- There is said to have existed palatalization (i.e. [tʲ, dʲ]) among all of the consonant sounds except for /j/ and possibly for /ʃ/ and /ʒ/.
- The sounds /f/ and /h/ also existed in Old Prussian, but are disputed whether they are native to the language.

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i iː		u uː
Mid	eː		oː
Low		a aː	

Diphthongs

	Front	Back
Mid	ei	
Open	ai	au

- /au/ may have also been realized as a mid-back diphthong [eu].

Revived Old Prussian

A few linguists and philologists are involved in reviving a reconstructed form of the language from Luther's catechisms, the Elbing Vocabulary, place names, and Prussian loanwords in the Low Prussian dialect of German. Several dozen people use the language in Lithuania, Kaliningrad, and Poland, including a few children who are natively bilingual.

The Prusaspirā Society has published their translation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. The book was translated by Piotr Szatkowski (Pīteris Šātkis) and released in 2015.[19] The other efforts of Baltic Prussian societies include the development of online dictionaries, learning apps and games. There also have been several attempts to produce music with lyrics written in the revived Baltic Prussian language, most notably in the Kaliningrad Oblast by Romowe Rikoito[20], Kellan and Āustras Laīwan, but also in Lithuania by Kūlgrinda in their 2005 album *Prūsų Giesmės* (Prussian Hymns),[21] and in Latvia by Rasa Ensemble in 1988[22] and Valdis Muktupāvels in his 2005 oratorio "Pārcēlātājs Pontifex" featuring several parts sung in Prussian.[23]

Important in this revival was Vytautas Mažiulis, who died on 11 April 2009, and his pupil Letas Palmaitis, leader of the experiment and author of the website *Prussian Reconstructions*.[24] Two late contributors were Prāncis Arellis (Pranciškus Erelis), Lithuania, and Dailūns Russinis (Dailonis Rusiņš), Latvia. After them, Twankstas Glabbis from Kaliningrad oblast and Nērtiks Pamedīns from East-Prussia, now Polish Warmia-Mazuria actively joined.

See also

- Low Prussian dialect
- Masurian dialect

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6. Encyclopædia Britannica article on Baltic languages (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/to pic/50949/Baltic-languages/74885/Loanwords-in-Baltic)

7. Trautmann (1910), p. VII: "Sie hat noch genau 400 Jahre nach der endgültigen Unterwerfung (1283) als unterdrückte Sprache einer unterdrückten Bevölkerung weitergelebt."

8. *A Short History of Austria-Hungary and Poland* by H. Wickham Steed, et al. Historicaltextarchive.com (http://historicaltextarchive.com/books.php?op=viewbook&bookid=2& cid=24)

> "For a time, therefore, the Protestants had to be cautious in Poland proper, but they found a sure refuge in Prussia, where Lutheranism was already the established religion, and where the newly erected University of Königsberg became a seminary for Polish ministers and preachers."

9. Ccel.org (http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc09/htm/iv.iii.vii.htm), Christianity in Poland

> "Albert of Brandenburg, Grand Master of the German Order in Prussia, called as preacher to Konigsberg Johann Briesaman (q.v.), Luther's follower (1525); and changed the territory of the order into a hereditary grand duchy under Polish protection. From these borderlands the movement penetrated Little Poland which was the nucleus for the extensive kingdom. [...] In the meantime the movement proceeded likewise among the nobles of Great Poland; here the type was Lutheran, instead of Reformed, as in Little Poland. Before the Reformation the Hussite refugees had found asylum here; now the Bohemian and Moravian brethren, soon to be known as the Unity of the Brethren (q.v.), were expelled from their home countries and, on their way to Prussia (1547), about 400 settled in Posen under the protection of the Gorka, Leszynski, and Ostrorog families."

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External links

- Database of the Old Prussian Linguistic Heritage (http://www.prusistika.flf.vu.lt/) (Etymological Dictionary of Old Prussian (in Lithuanian) and full textual corpus)
- Frederik Kortlandt: Electronic text editions (http://www.kortlandt.nl/editions/) (contains transcriptions of Old Prussian manuscript texts)
- M. Gimbutas Map Western Balts-Old Prussians (http://google.com/search?q=cache:e3NfRHojAqsJ:www.vaidilute.com/books/gimbutas/gimbutas-01.html+tributary+prussia&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=5&gl=us)
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